Commonwealth of Kentucky
Energy and Environment Cabinet

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Ashland-Huntington Area Meets Fine Particle Standards for Air Quality

Boyd County& Portion of Lawrence County Re-designated 'Attainment' by EPA

FRANKFORT, Ky. (Dec. 26, 2012) – Air quality is officially better in the Ashland-Huntington area, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The EPA announced that it has approved the tri-state area in eastern Kentucky to be re-designated to "attainment" for fine particle pollution, effective today, after monitors showed significant improvement in air quality.

"Kentuckians in the Ashland area are breathing easier, thanks to a strong partnership between state and local governments, businesses and industry," said Energy and Environment Cabinet (EEC) Secretary Len Peters. "Redesignation to attainment also benefits economic development by eliminating the need for stricter permitting requirements."

The Clean Air Act requires states to meet National Ambient Air Quality Standards for specific pollutants to protect human health and the environment. On Jan. 27, 2011, EEC's Division for Air Quality (DAQ) submitted a request for the U.S. EPA to recognize Boyd County and a portion of Lawrence County as meeting the 1997 annual standard for fine particulate matter ($PM_{2.5}$). The 1997 standard established an annual limit of 15 micrograms per cubic meter, based on a three-year average of air monitoring data.

This redesignation comes just on the heels of a new EPA ruling on fine particle pollution. Earlier this month the EPA finalized an update to its annual $PM_{2.5}$ standard, further tightening the health-based standard to 12 micrograms per cubic meter. The latest air monitoring data from Boyd County show compliance with the new standard as well.

$PM_{2.5}$ refers to microscopic particles or droplets in the air that measure 2.5 microns or less in diameter which is about 30 times smaller than the width of a human hair. Particles of this size are hazardous to human health because they can easily be inhaled deep into lungs and even cross into the bloodstream. Major sources of $PM_{2.5}$ include vehicle exhaust as well as fossil fuel and wood burning.

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